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E V I L

Of Our Dayes.

WITH



The Remedy of it.

A

S E R M O N

P R E A C H ' D

At a *VISITATION* at Rothwell in  
*Northamptonshire*, Octob. 12. 1697.

By *John Howard* M. A. Rector of *Marston Trussell* in  
the same County.

L O N D O N,

Printed for *John Lawrence* at the *Angel* in the *Poultry*, 1698.

THE

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The Remedy of it

SEERMON

592:90  
REACHED

Attest in witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and the seal of the said Court, at the City of London, the 12th day of October, 1697.

And I, the said Clerk, do hereby certify that the within said Remedy of it, is the true and correct copy of the original thereof, as the same is now in the possession of the said Court.

Witness my hand and the seal of the said Court, at the City of London, the 12th day of October, 1697.

John Doe, Clerk of the said Court.

A

## Visitation-Sermon.

E P H E S. V. 16.

*Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

**A**S all the Churches under St. Paul's Care, were great Instances of his Wisdom and Diligence in the Ministry; so none more than that of *Ephesus*. He had been Resident with them about Three years together, and by God's Blessing upon his Zealous and Painful Endeavours, Converted many, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, to the Faith of Christ. At his departure from them, he left *Timothy* to be their Bishop, a Man excellently qualified for that Office, and fit to carry on the Great Work which the Apostle had so happily Advanc'd. And that he might do it the better, he sent his First *Epistle* to him not long after, wherein he gave him full Instructions about all the Duties of his Holy Function. Yet some years after this, when he was Prisoner at *Rome* for the sake of the Gospel, fearing least his Sufferings might discourage the Christians at *Ephesus*, and considering also what Temptations they had at home to shake their Faith, that no means might be wanting for their further Confirmation and Perseverance in it, he Writes this *Epistle* to them for these ends. Wherein he first Praises God for those Admirable Privileges they enjoy'd by virtue of Christ's Redemption, and for the Constancy of their Faith, Praying that they

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they might Increase in Wisdom and Holiness. Then he puts them in mind of their sinful and miserable estate before Conversion, and of the rich Mercy and Grace of God in delivering them out of it. To this he adds an account of the particular Grace of God to himself, in Calling him to the Ministry, in making Extraordinary Revelations to him, and sending him to Preach among the *Gentiles*, the unsearchable Riches of Christ: whereby not onely Men, but the holy Angels too, would be further Instructed in the Mysterious Effects of Man's Redemption. Wherefore he Exhorts them not to faint at his Tribulations for them; and Prays for the increase of their Spiritual Strength, their Faith, Love and Divine Knowledge, and that they might be filled with all the fullness of God. And having spent near half the Epistle upon these Subjects, which were most fit to confirm and encourage them; he does in the following part of it exhort them to those necessary Duties which the Priviledges beforemention'd do call for: Beseeching them first in the general to walk worthy of their Vocation, and then particularly directing them in their whole Behaviour towards God, and the World. And amongst other excellent Rules, he gives them many particular Cautions, both in the fourth and fifth Chapters, against all the Sins of the Age and Place they lived in; arguing from the danger of them to their Souls, (notwithstanding what some deceivers might suggest to the contrary,) from that great and admirable Change which was wrought in them, from the proper Fruit and Efficacy of the Holy Spirit, their Duty on the contrary, to reprove such things, and the shame that belong'd to them, that they must by all means avoid those Sins. And having now in many instances directed and warn'd them, he seems to summe up all in the Verse before and in that of my Text—*See then that ye walk Circumspectly, &c.* Βλῆθῃτε καὶ περιστοφῶντες ὑμᾶς, see therefore how Circumspectly, Diligently or Exactly ye walk— Which words do imply, seeing by the free Grace of God, and his infinite Love in Jesus Christ, ye were call'd out of Darkness into Light; from a State of Ignorance, Infidelity, and Misery, to that of a Divine Knowledge, Holiness and Salvation; since ye enjoy the glorious Privi-



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Priviledges Christ has purchas'd for you by his own Blood, for the increase of Spiritual Graces and Comforts in your Souls, and Security of your Eternal Happiness; since you live amongst many Adversaries and great Temptations to Sin against God, whereby you would forfeit his Blessings and incurre his Displeasure; -- *Βασις* -- therefore look to your selves, that ye walk with all that exactness and caution which these things require in you, as it becomes wise Men to do. Which Precept is yet more briefly comprehended in the words of my Text, *Redeeming the Time*; for which the Apostle adds this one Reason, instead of many, *because the days are Evil*.

In speaking to these words I shall first shew the meaning of them, and how far they concern'd the *Ephesians*; and then apply them to our own case.

The Precept here, *ἐξαγοράζετε τὴν καιρὸν*, would (I think) be more fitly render'd, Buying the Season, For *ἐξαγοράζω* and *ἐξαγορά* Equas, signify to Buy or Purchase, as well as to Redeem, and *καιρὸς* is a Season or opportunity, in which sense time is also sometimes used. This is a Metaphorical expression taken from Merchants who will deny themselves, and take great care and pains, especially in a difficult time, to purchase Goods to their best Advantage. So the *Ephesians* are here exhorted to walk with the greatest Caution and exactness, that as wise Merchants, they may purchase that Treasure, the valuable Season which is put into their hands, and make it their own, by the most prudent and pious improvement of it; and the rather, *because the days are Evil*.

There are two things which make the time Evil, namely, Sin and Suffering. And for both these it was an Evil Time, when St. Paul wrote this Epistle, especially at *Ephesus*. There the *Gentils* were more than ordinarily Zealous for their vain Superstitions, chiefly in the Worship of their *Diana*. There all those Sins which the Heathens too generally liv'd in, did very much abound, and against which the Apostle does particularly warn the *Ephesians* in this Epistle. Here, in some of their Feasts, they Murder'd all they met with in the Streets, and at last put *Timothy* to Death, (as *Phobius* tells us) because he forbade them. Yea here, as if this was the chief Seat of the Devils Kingdom, were

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very many of his most professed Disciples, Magicians or Sorcerers, as appears from the great number of them *St. Paul* had converted, the price of whose Books was fifty Thousand pieces of Silver, *Acts* 19. 19. Besides, here were already many false Teachers, as the followers of *Simon Magus*, the *Nicolaitans*, and about this time, or soon after, the *Ebionites* and *Cerinthians*, who endeavour'd as much as they could, to corrupt the Doctrines of Christ by their pestilent Heresies. Yea, from among themselves arose some Seducers too, as *Hymeneus*, *Alexander*, *Philetus* and others, mention'd in the Epistles to *Timothy*. Which things were exactly according to the Apostles Prediction, *Acts* 20. 29, 30. Where speaking to the Elders of *Ephesus*, he saith, *I know this, that after my departing, shall grievous Wolves enter in among you, not sparing the Flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away Disciples after them.* So evil were the days wherein these *Ephesians* liv'd, in respect of Sin. Therefore the Church could not be secure from the other evil of suffering.

But to say nothing of the secret Temptations of the Devil, which are common to all Christians in every time and place, though they must be suppos'd most violent where that enemy had such an interest to lose, and in so great danger, as at *Ephesus*. To pass by many other Troubles, which almost constantly attend a sincere Profession of the Gospel; Here the Disciples were always liable to Persecution for the sake of Christ, from the blind Heathens on the one hand, and the more obdurate Jews on the other. Here, as 'tis most probable, *St. Paul* and his Companions met with those great Troubles, which he complains of, *2 Cor.* 1. 8. which press'd them out of measure, above strength, insomuch that they despair'd even of Life; and had the Sentence of Death in themselves. For it is certain he was in danger at *Ephesus* of being carried to the Theatre, (*Acts* 19. 29, 30.) to be devour'd there, as we may suppose, by Wild Beasts kept for the Execution of Malefactors, and to which Christians afterwards were sometimes expos'd. Therefore he sayes, That, *after the manner of Men*, (*2<sup>d</sup> Adam*, according to Man, or, so far as was in Man's Power) *he fought with Beasts at Ephesus*, *1 Cor.* 15. 32. And it cannot be suppos'd, but the Church must

must be always in a Suffering State, and receive daily Affronts from the Rage and Malice of such Enemies among whom they liv'd; though *Sr. Paul* does not directly mention it in this Epistle; for this Reason, it may be, least it might have Exasperated their Enemies the more against them; and therefore he gives only such general hints to it, as this in the Text. Now because they endur'd these and some following Persecutions, with a true Christian Courage and Patience, our Saviour mentions this to their honour, *Rev. 2.3. Thou hast born, and hast patience, and for my Names sake hast labour'd, and hast not fainted.* Thus it appears these *Ephesians* liv'd in an evil time, both in respect of Sin and Suffering; and it is with relation to these especially, that the Apostle Exhorts them, *ἐν σοφίᾳ καὶ κατανόᾳ*, to make the best Merchandise of the present season, by behaving themselves with that wisdom and circumspection, which such evil Times did especially require. And in this sense it will best agree with what appears to be the design of the same Exhortation to the *Colossians*, Chap. 4.5. *Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.* That is, use that prudence in your Conversation towards Unbelievers, that ye may preserve your selves from their sins, and from suffering by their means, and gain upon them, if possible, in order to their receiving the Faith of Christ.

Now this Exhortation, and the reason by which it is enforc'd, do nearly concern all Christians at this day, and in this Nation, but especially Ministers of the Gospel, who, of all Men, should be most sensible of the evil of the Times, as indeed they usually feel the greatest share of it; and who have a more considerable and difficult part to act with relation to it than others. Therefore, in the following part of my Discourse, I shall chiefly confine my self to them. And because the Apostle exhorts us to redeem the time, with respect to the evil of it, I shall first represent to you the evil of our present days, and then shew how we are to redeem the time with respect to it.

*First.* I shall give some account of the evil of our dayes, both in respect of sin and suffering.

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1. In respect of Sin. And here I have a very Melancholy Scene before me, and such as I had rather secretly lament, than describe to you, were it not necessary we should know and consider this dreadful evil, in order to its Cure, if it be not past remedy. We live in an Age and Nation, wherein too many are Monstrously corrupted in their Judgment and Manners. Some are sunk so far below the common reason and sense of Mankind, as to deny the God that made them, though there is a thousand times more certainty of his existence, than their own. Others will own no Religion but what is Natural, because, they cannot comprehend those Mysteries God has reveal'd to us; and so they deny the Lord that bought them. Some arrogate to themselves a Power of keeping the whole Law, and attaining Perfection and Happiness by that means; others contend for a Chimerical Faith, that has neither grounds nor effects, as sufficient for Salvation, how bad soever Men are in their hearts and conversations; and so make our Blessed Lord himself (as much as lies in them) a Patron of vice and wickedness, and his Holy Religion a pretence for the vilest practices. What shall we say of Popery, that Hydra of errors, which have been so often baffled, and yet they live? Though, one would think, if the Men of that Religion would seriously consult either Faith, or Reason, and that Law of Kindness, which is naturally written in our hearts, they must needs be ashamed of their gross Idolatry, of the many contradictions and absurdities they have receiv'd, and that Cruelty practiced in their Church towards all Men, that dare be wiser than themselves. To these I might add, the Dreams and Fancies of many *Enthusiasts* among us, who conceive such Notions of God, and their Duty towards him, as are unworthy of his Being, and so far below those excellent discoveries he has made of his Nature and Will in holy Scriptures, that their own Reason, as imperfect as it is, would in a great measure correct these mistakes, if they would but attend to it.

Now what can be the fruit of such errors in Mens Minds, but a Corruption also in their Conversation? which indeed is very great and common amongst us. What horrid Oaths and Blaphemies,

phemies, what scoffs at Religion and the sincere Professors of it, are heard in many places? How is the Sacred Name of God, his Ordinances and Providences despis'd? How are his holy Word and Ministers Ridicul'd, and made Subjects for the Profane Wit and Raillery of those senseless Men, who thus abuse the gifts of God, to his dishonour and their own destruction? And does not Profaneness, in some measure, enter into our very Churches too? For even there we often observe a behaviour in Men very unfutable to those Places, and the holy Duties perform'd in them. What irreverence is us'd in Prayer? What indifferency in hearing the Word of God? Yea what drowfiness is indulg'd by some, and what levities practis'd by others, while they are present at these Ordinances? And if the Sacred Rights of God are thus violated by sinfull Men, it is the less wonder they should also invade those of their Neighbours, and that we so often hear of Contentions, Murders, Adulteries, Thefts, Oppressions, False-witness, Malicious Slanders, Revilings, &c. and that there is so much Pride, Covetousness and Intemperance amongst us. To these I must add the many Rents and Divisions in the Church of Christ, whereby Men do a great indignity to our blessed Lord himself, and frustrate, as much as lies in them, one gracious end of his dying for us, the uniting all into one body; the many Petitions also he made to God the Father, and the excellent Precepts he has given us to this purpose. And hence it is, (as well as from other causes before-mention'd) that the Houses of God are so little frequented, his Worship both in Publick and Private so strangely neglected, and particularly the Sacrament of the Lords Supper, that holy Feast instituted by our Saviour for a Commemoration of his dying Love to us, to engage us more strictly in that service which is perfect freedom, and to convey Spiritual Grace and Comfort to us. How is this neglected by most Men? as if they had no sense of their Baptismal Engagements, which are here repeated, of the most gracious work of Mans Redemption by the death of Christ here represented, or the Interest and Happiness of their precious and Immortal Souls, which would be very much promoted by a serious and frequent attendance on this holy Ordinance. Hence



also is that almost general indifferency in Religion, I mean in respect of the great substantials of it ; for there is too much Zeal in all parties for those lesser things which distinguish them from other Protestants. They are very fond of the occasions and marks of their Separation from their brethren, as if needless divisions in the Church, which were of old condemn'd by our great Apostle as works of the Flesh, had now chang'd their Nature, and were become means of Grace and Salvation ! The intemperate heats Men have for these things, together with those of Worldly and Carnal Affections, have almost exhausted that true Zeal for God, and that sincere Affection to one another, which are the distinguishing Marks of Christs Disciples. It is because Iniquity does so abound, that the love of many is grown cold : though for this very reason, it ought to have been more fervent, as will appear hereafter. Thus have I mention'd some of the most common Sins amongst us, wherein we may seem a parallel even to *Ephesus* it self, when this Epistle was written. If the Heathens there were violent Idolaters and Persecutors of Christians, such are our Papists too ; if sometimes they practic'd barbarous Cruelties upon any they met with, and were ordinarily very dissolute and licentious in their Lives ; we are not without instances of the former sort, and do too much abound with those of the latter : and our Atheist is such a monster as perhaps was not known amongst them. If Errors and Heresies did infest the Church then, we have some of the worst of them reviv'd in our days, and have added many others to them. If there were some perverse Men in the Church at *Ephesus*, that separated themselves, and drew Disciples after them, these are far outdone by the many Schisms and Divisions amongst us at this day. If the believing *Ephesians* were accus'd, some time after the writing of this Epistle, for having left their first Love, *Rev.* 2. 4. how much more may we be condemn'd for almost the entire loss of ours, and falling into a luke-warmness, like that charg'd upon *Laodicea*, and for which our Blessed Saviour so severely threatens her ? We may therefore say of our own days, in respect of the Sins that abound amongst us, as the Apostle did of those he liv'd in, that they are Evil. And the

the more, because those in our days that commit the same Sins with the Heathens at *Ephesus*, have been better instructed than they, and profess a pure and undefil'd Religion; and all wilful Sins amongst us, are committed against as many gracious Providences of God towards us, as were ever shew'd to any Nation.

2. Our days are Evil too in respect of Suffering. But here I will acknowledge, to the praise of God's Goodness and Patience, that we are not liable to such bloody Persecutions, as the *Ephesians* were daily in danger of. We live not under Laws that make our Religion a Capital Crime, or Magistrates that are ready to Judge and Condemn us for it to the most Cruel Deaths. Yea, though the Protestants, in several Neighbouring Nations, have been thus barbarously dealt with by the Papists, and we our selves were in imminent danger of the same sufferings, it pleas'd God, of his infinite goodness. to prevent them by an unexpected and wonderful deliverance; and now at last to confirm this more, and free us from many sensible effects of a long and dreadful War, by the Peace which is so happily concluded. But notwithstanding these undeserv'd effects of God's Mercy, I have said enough already to prove one of the greatest Persecutions at this time, and in this Nation, that can befall good men, but especially faithful Ministers. St. *Augustin* (*Hom. 10.*) speaking of those words of the Apostle, *2 Tim. 3. 12. All that will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*; brings in this Question, by way of Objection, When the Church is in a state of Peace and Tranquility, Protected by Laws, and Defended by Princes, How then do they, who live Godly, suffer Persecution? To which he Answers, *Qui inter malos vivunt, persecutionem patiuntur; quia omnes mali persequuntur bonos, non ferro & lapidibus, sed vita & moribus.* They who live amongst Evil Men, do suffer Persecution; for all Evil Men Persecute the Good, not with Sword and Stones, but by their Life and Manners. And then he Instances in the case of *Lot in Sodom*, whom none Persecuted



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or Molested there, but only by their Wicked Lives. With which, as St. Peter tells us, *is Rack'd or Tortur'd his Righteous Soul from day to day.* And indeed this Persecution has been always very Grievous to Good Men. It drew Rivers of Waters from the Psalmist's Eyes, and made the Soul of *Jeremy* weep in secret places. Yea, for this, as well as for the Judgments it would bring upon *Judah*, he passionately wishes, That his head were waters, and his eyes a fountain of Tears, that he might weep day and night for them, *Jer. 9. 1.* And none will wonder at this, that consider how Injurious sin is to the Honour of Almighty God, how contrary to the Temper of every Good Man, and in what danger it puts them that are guilty of eternal Damnation. And if these sinners be under our own charge, our Affliction is the greater on their account. If St. John had no greater Joy, than to hear that his Children walked in Truth, nothing could afflict him more, than their defection from it. If it was the Joy and Crown, yea the very Life of St. Paul, that the Churches, under his Care, stood fast in the Faith, it must be a matter of great trouble, and humiliation, yea something like Death it self to him, if they deserted it. Nay, if in some cases, as St. John Teaches, we ought to lay down our Lives for the Brethren; that is, in a time of Persecution, when it may appear necessary for the Confirmation of them that Believe, and the Conversion of others: then their willfull continuance in sin, or manifest defection from the Faith, ought to be more grievous to us than Death it self. And alas! How many such cases as these do we see in our Parishes? Some who have been under our Preaching many years, and, it may be, receiv'd private Instructions from us too, are yet grossly ignorant of the plainest and most necessary Principles of Religion. Others who have Improv'd more in Knowledge, are notwithstanding very loose and scandalous in their Lives. Some that cannot be much accus'd, either of Ignorance, or gross Commissions, are very defective in their Piety towards God, Charity towards their Neighbours, or those Relative Duties they are particularly oblig'd to. Others that would seem, it may be, to have a regard to all these, for want of a sound and settled Judgment in Religion,

ligion, are easily impos'd on by the subtilty of seducing spirits, and drawn away from our Communion. Now can any thing more sensible grieve a Faithful Minister, who has the Care of those *Souls*, and has taken much pains to Instruct and Edify them in the Faith of Christ, than to see them thus despise or desert him, and hazard their own Eternal salvation? God has set us over our People as Pastors over their Flocks, yea as Fathers over their Children. And can we be suppos'd the only *Shepherds* that are indifferent what becomes of our *Flocks*; or the only Fathers that have no Compassion for our Children, or Concern for their Eternal Happiness? The Care, Diligence and Watchfulness of all the Faithful servants of Christ, do plainly bespeak the contrary.

Therefore, though these unhappy Men, who thus frustrate our Pains with them, intend it not as a Persecution to us, yet the Devil, who Tempts them to it, does really intend this, who knows how much it is his Interest, to discourage us in our Great Work, and he cannot more effectually do it, than by this means.

But this is not the only Persecution which we suffer more than other Christians, but our Holy Office, the Honour of which ought to be dearer to us than our Lives, does, at this day, ly under a very great, and almost General Contempt. And hence it is, that the worst Construction is so often put upon our Words and Actions, that many Calumnies are so easily cast upon us by some, and so readily believ'd by others, &c. Thus are we Persecuted even with Swords, though not in St. *Augustin's* sense before mention'd, yet in that of holy *David*, who Complaining, of the Malicious Speeches of his Enemies against him (*Psal. 59.*) says, *That Swords are in their Lips.* I may add to these things the Invasion of our Sacred Office by many, who have neither Gifts nor Opportunities to fit them for it; and therefore while they presume to be Teachers, do justly fall under the Apostles Censure upon some such Men at *Ephesus*, that they understand neither what they say, nor whereof they Affirm. I might mention also several other Injuries we often suffer as Ministers, but it is time for me to

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come to the other part of my *Text*; and I have been the longer and more particular upon this, because the knowledge of these things, I will not say, (For who does not know them?) but a serious sense of them will be a great step toward their Cure, which I shall now

2. Consider, in speaking to the Precept in my *Text*, *Redeeming the time*, or Buying the Season. Here therefore I must shew how we are to use, and improve our time, with respect to the Evils be foremention'd.

1. The Evil of Sin. 2. The Evil of Suffering.

*First*. The Evil of Sin. And here we must take care,

*First*. To preserve our selves from it. *Secondly*. To do what lies in us to Remedy it.

*First*. To preserve our selves from this Evil, and lead a Conversation as contrary to it as is possible. And this the Apostle does exhort the *Ephesians* to, in many particulars before my *Text*, and must be suppos'd to intend it in this Precept, as much as any thing else. There ly indeed very great Obligations upon all that Name the Name of Christ, to depart from Iniquity, and be followers of him, in a pious and useful Conversation; but especially Ministers of the Gospel, whom he has appointed in his own stead, not only to instruct others in the way to Heaven, but also to lead them in by a holy Example. And it concerns them, for the honour of God, and the safety of themselves and others, to be the more circumspect, as Sin is more common amongst us. Therefore, if Errors and Heresies do so much abound in this Nation, we ought to be more diligent in searching after the Truth, and constantly adhere to it. If others are so vicious in their Lives, it lies upon us to be the more Sober and Innocent; to watch carefully against Temptations, and to preserve our selves not only from all gross Commissions, but also (as far as may be) from the very appearance of Evil. If the Duties of Religion, both

towards

towards God and Men, are strangely neglected; by many that would go for Christians; let us be the more zealous and constant in the performance of them. If a great Indifferency in Religion has obtain'd amongst all Orders of Men; and there remain but few Sparks of that Holy Fire of Zeal and ~~of~~ Devotion, which makes our Service an Acceptable Sacrifice to God; let us by all means, endeavour to Revive and Cherish it in our selves, and make it the more intense; by reason of that Coldness with which we are encompass'd. For in so General a Defection from the Life and Power of Godliness, What will become of the Honour of God and his Cause in the World, if we desert it, or are cold in it? And what greater Judgments than any we have yet felt, may reasonably be expected for this Apostacy, if the Righteousness of our Lives, and Sincere Importunity of our Prayers, do not prevent them?

*Secondly.* We must do what we can to remedy this Evil. And what I have already mention'd, the Holiness of our Lives, will do very much towards it. For this will naturally create a Veneration for us in the Minds of Men, and give us more Authority in the use of other Means. It will provoke them that have any remains of Piety in their Hearts, Confirm such as are wavering in the Faith, and half perswade those who were before Averse to Religion, of the Truth and Excellency of those Doctrines, which they see have had so much power upon our selves, and produce such amiable fruits in our Conversion. For there is a beauty in Holiness, which every eye (one would think) may in some measure discern. There is a greatness in Self-denial and contempt of the World, which commands admiration; and there are those charms in Humility and condescension, in meekness and compassion, in a civil and courteous behaviour towards all Men, that must needs abate something of the most inveterate prejudices against the ways of God, and win very much upon those that are in some measure prepar'd for them. Yea, they will give us such an interest in their affections, as will make them more apt to consider, and receive good Instructions from us. And which is more than all this, our faithfulness to God in such an holy Conver-

Conversation will qualify us for his blessing upon the endeavours we use for the good of others.

The other means necessary to remedy the Evil of Sin, are especially these following.

1. We must endeavour to convince those that are guilty.
  2. We must warn and instruct others.
  3. We must pray to God for his blessing upon these things.
1. We must endeavour to convince those that are guilty.

In order to which it will be necessary.

1. To use the fittest arguments with such as err in Judgment.
2. To reprove those that are guilty of other Sins.
3. To shew kindness both to the one and the other, as there may be occasion.

1. To use the fittest arguments with such as err in Judgment. The Principal of these, if he be properly reckon'd amongst them, is the Atheist; but I think his Error is rather in the will. Some Men (if they deserve that name) have so much improv'd their Natural Affection to Sin, by indulging themselves in it, that they cannot with any comfort think there is a God, who will Judge and Reward them according to their deeds, and therefore heartily wish there were no such Being. Which seems to be the *Psalmist's* meaning, when he says, *Psalm* 14. 1. *The fool hath said in his heart: (that is, in the desires of it) that there is no God; and in the next words tells us whence this Atheism proceeds, They are corrupt, they have done abominable works. And therefore while they talk as if Atheism was their belief, it may be, these bold Efforts against Heaven are intended*

intended only for some excuse of their Wicked Lives. For it is hard to think, that they who have the least remains of Reason in them, should be able to resist all the plain and most sensible evidences of God's Existence. While they open their eyes, they see as many proofs of it, as there are beings in their view, or Motions and Properties in those Beings: and if they shut them, every thought of their Hearts is a demonstration of it. So that one would think, a Man must go out of the World, and from himself too, before he can be altogether insensible of the Divine Existence. But if his mind can be so far besotted with Sensuality, as to lose all sense of it, it is in vain to use any rational Arguments to convince him. Some indeed have taken pains to answer this fool according to his folly, in shewing the inconsistency of his dreams and fancies; it may be, with respect to that Rule, *Prov.* 26. 5. that he might be no longer wise in his own conceit: and have excellently set before him the most considerable Arguments of God's Being and Providence. But he that can shut his eyes against all the visible Testimonies of these things, will probably have very little sense of the force of their Arguments. Yea, it is like, this way of dealing with him, will make him but the more conceited of himself. For while he is treated as a Man of Reason, he will take encouragement to shuffle off all that can be said against his Principles; and there is little question but he will find as good pretences for it, as for his former unbelief. But I confess these discourses are of great use to others, to confirm their Faith, and assist them upon every observation of those things, from whence the Author's arguments are taken, to be more sensible of God's presence with them, and of the dominion he exercises in the World. One would think the most proper Argument to work upon this sensualist, (if he be capable of any) would be from the delight and safety of true Religion, *whose ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are Peace.* Of which, if the little Reason he has left will not convince him, he might at least make Trial, and prefer that course which he finds to be best. But why do I speak of arguing with a Beast? For if it be Religion which distinguishes Man from the brute Creatures, as some great Authors have resolv'd; the Atheist



who is fallen from it, must be reckon'd amongst them. And I think the Wise Man does direct the proper method of dealing with him, when he says, *A whip for the Horse, and a bridle for the Ass, and a rod for the fools back*, Prov. 26. 3. It is sense, through the pleasure of Sin, that has betray'd him to this Error; and it must be Sense, through the smart of Suffering, that will cure him of it. 'Tis therefore the Magistrates work chiefly to convert this Apostate. And we cannot sufficiently lament it, that while Humane Laws are so jealous of every invasion of our own Rights, and so severely executed upon them, the most bold and dreadful Impieties against God, whose cause we should prefer a thousand times before our own, do escape Punishment.

The next I shall mention are the Socinians, who have shew'd so much confidence of late, in publishing and defending their notions, as if they might appeal to the reason of Mankind for the Justice of them. These Men seem to own Revelation in the general, but at the same time assert such Principles as overthrow it; but whether this be owing most to their Reason or their Piety, I leave it to themselves to determine. Some amongst us, who I believe have been far from their Opinions, have notwithstanding paid a great deference to their Reason. But though they themselves have set up this Idol in opposition to Almighty God, to judge of his deep and holy Mysteries, 'tis pity any others should fall down and Worship it. And had these Men but carefully examin'd, what they have blindly ador'd, they would have been of a very different Opinion. The fittest way, I think, to deal with these Adversaries, is, instead of magnifying their Reason, to shew them the weakness of it. Which seems no hard matter to do, if they had but Humility enough to think it fallible. For, when there is an equal Evidence of the Divine Authority of several books of Scripture, what reason is there they should receive some of these, and reject others? If they cannot deny there are unaccountable Mysteries in the connection and divisibility of the parts of matter, in motion, in the union of the Soul with the Body, and many other things, whose existence they are assur'd

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of: with what Reason do they deny these in Religion, which has for its object an Infinite God, all whose Attributes must needs be incomprehensible to finite Beings, and the whole intercourse between him and our Souls, as to the manner of it, above the reach of an Humane Judgment? Spiritual things are certainly further remote from our understanding, than those that are Natural; and yet these Men of Reason will allow no Mystery in them, while they are forc'd to acknowledge very many in the other. To this we may add their rational way of Interpreting Scriptures, whereby they would make those Divine Oracles appear as void of good Sense and Reason as themselves. But neither these, nor any other efforts of their exalted Reason, want any confutation from me, since they have been sufficiently baffled of late, as well as formerly, by several worthy Authors. But it becomes all true Ministers of the Gospel, (and indeed every good Christian) that acknowledge and adore the ever-blessed Trinity, together with the Infinite Wisdom, Justice and Goodness of God, in the Incarnation of our blessed Lord and Saviour both God and Man, and that great Redemption he hath wrought for us; that are sensible of Original, as well as Actual Sin, and what need the World had of that meritorious Sacrifice, offer'd by our glorious High-Priest, in his own Body upon the Cross, to reconcile them to God, and the imputation of his Righteousness for their Justification: It becomes us, I say, upon all fit occasions, to declare our abhorrence of such Antichristian Principles, as those of the Socinians are, which strike at the very foundation of our Religion, and were doubtless instill'd into Mens minds by our great Adversary, in order to the Destruction of it. But we know it is defended by a stronger than he, who will one day call this Enemy, and all his adherents, to an account for these things. And here I cannot forbear mentioning another detestable notion of these Men, or their Friends, lately publish'd, that there is but one Article of Faith propos'd in the New Testament, as necessary to be believ'd in order to Salvation; namely this, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. But these discoveres don't perceive that he who made this confession, *Acts* 8 37. believ'd all other Articles of our Faith before; and that this, rightly under-

understood, does include and suppose all the rest. What a strange degree of Pride and confidence is this, that makes Men dare to vent new notions in Religion! As if all the Learned, Wise and Holy Men, from the Apostles time till this Age, never rightly understood the conditions of Salvation! And then, how will this reflect upon the Wisdom or Sincerity of the sacred Writers of the New Testament, yea of the Holy Ghost himself, if by them he has so obscurely deliver'd truths of this moment, that they could never be rightly understood for above sixteen hundred years together? But the design of these Men is to disparage the Holy Scriptures, and therefore they deal with them as with a System of Natural Philosophy, that is liable to be chang'd in every Age, as new truths are discover'd, or pretended so in that Science. It behoves us therefore with all the Zeal of Good Christians and Faithful Ministers, to represent, as there may be occasion, the Wickedness and danger of such Innovations, and prevent, as much as lies in us, the growth of them amongst our People. And we should do the same also against all other false Notions in Religion, common in these days, which I have not time now to mention. I shall therefore only add something in the general, concerning those lesser differences in Opinion amongst Protestants, which are the causes of Divisions in the Church. These I think, might, in a great measure, be reconcil'd, if they were once but rightly understood, and fairly argued by the Parties concern'd in them; especially if that mutual condescension could be us'd on all hands which the Rules and Interest of our Religion do require. And it must be always remember'd, that when we have to do with Persons Erroneous in Judgment, (if there be any hopes of convincing them) all our arguments must be us'd with great kindness and compassion towards them, that if possible we may gain upon their affections, and then their Judgment will much sooner surrender to us. For, to accuse a Man of Errors in this kind, seems most directly to reflect upon his Wisdom, which Men have usually a greater opinion of in themselves, than any thing else; and therefore it had need be done in the softest and most obliging manner. Besides, this way of dealing with Men, shews we have a respect for them, and give them also a greater opinion of our  
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Piety and Wisdom, as well as of our good will towards them, on which accounts they will be more apt to consider our arguments, and yield to them.

2. We must Reprove the sins of Mens lives; such as I before mention'd, and all others that appear to us: as the Apostle exhorts, *vers. 11. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.* This is required of all Men, as a necessary act of Charity to our Neighbours, *Lev. 19. 17. Thou shalt not hate thy Brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy Neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.* But Ministers must especially do this with all Authority, *Tit. 2. 15.* and with all long-suffering, *2 Tim. 4. 2.* Yet these Precepts do not oblige us in respect of all Men; for we are Caution'd not to Reprove a Scornor, *Prov. 9. 8.* That is, one so harden'd in sin, that he will despise the Means we use to reform him, and return evil upon us for our Charity to him. Such our Blessed Saviour calls *Dogs* and *Swine*, and has left us this Rule concerning them, *Mat. 7. 6. Give not that which is Holy unto the Dogs, neither cast ye your Pearls before Swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rent you.* But I think there are few that we ought to account such, till we have made some trial of them, and Admonish'd them according to our Saviour's Command, both Privately and before Witness; and, if this course proves ineffectual, they are to receive the Censures of the Church. But we must not always Reprove Men so soon as they have sinned, or we come to the knowledge of it, but when we have most reason to hope for the good effect of it; and, in such a manner, as is most suitable to the temper and condition of those we have to deal with in order to it. For, next to the Glory of God, the main end of Reproof is the gaining of our Brother; which, if it can be done by a discreet use of this means, the Eternal Happiness of his Soul will be secur'd, the Honour of God most promoted, and our own Consciences best discharged by it.

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3. We must shew Kindness to all evil Men, as there may be occasion for it; what Enmity soever they may bear to us: according to our Saviour's Precept, Mat. 5. 44. *I say unto you love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you:* and this he enjoins as a matter of great advantage to our selves, as in the Verse following, *that ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven.* St. Paul (after Solomon) gives us a like Precept, in order to the Spiritual good of our Enemy, Rom. 12. 20. *If thine enemy hunger feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.* Which is a Metaphor taken from Metals, that are soonest melted when fire is cast upon them. And therefore the Sense of these words seems to be, by these means thou shalt soften thine Enemy, and reconcile him to thee. For though they will bear another Sense, yet this is most probably intended by the Apostle, because he adds in the Verse following, *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.* Now if an Enmity conceiv'd against us, upon the account of the Gospel, may be thus conquer'd, a Person is thereby reconcil'd to Religion, and so brought into the way of Salvation. And what greater Motive can we have to shew kindness to our Enemies, next to the Glory of God, and the Happiness of our own Souls, than the probability of convincing them of sin, and bringing them to Repentance and Reconciliation with God by this means? This Kindness will also give a great advantage (as was before hinted) to such other means as we use to convince any Sinners. It will add strength to our Arguments with them that err in judgment, and make all our Reproofs and Instructions come with greater Force and Authority upon others.

2. As we are to use these Means to convince the Guilty, so we must also Warn and Instruct others, that they fall not into the same Errors, either in Judgment or Practice. To this end it will be necessary, with all plainness and earnestness, to Represent to our People the Sinfulness of our Nature, the evil and danger of Sin, the many Temptations we are encompass'd with, and the  
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Judgments of God denounc'd against Sin, both in this and a future State. And on the other hand, the natural goodness of God to his Creatures, his Infinite Love in Christ to all that truly Repent of their Sins, believe in the Lord *Jesus*, and obey his Commands; the Comfort and Happiness of a Holy Life here, and the Glorious Salvation which will be the Reward of it hereafter. To these things we must add particular Cautions against those Sins and Errors which are most common amongst us, shewing the dangerous consequence of them. And all this with such a Sense and Zeal, as may convince them we believe it our Selves, that we have a true Compassion for their Souls, and desire of their happiness. But our greatest care should be employ'd about the most hopeful part of our Charge, the Children in our several Parishes, to Instruct them in the Principles and Rules of our Religion, that they may know whatsoever is necessary to be Believ'd and Practis'd in order to Salvation. To which end, we must not only take care that they are perfect in the Form of their *Catechism*, but endeavour, by explaining it familiarly to them, to make them understand it, as far as they are capable; that the Fear of God, and a Sense of their Duty to him, possessing their Hearts betimes, may preserve them from the sins of the present time, and fit them to do eminent Service to God hereafter. And we have the greater reason to hope for this success, because the habits of Sin being but weak in them, are more easily subdu'd by good Instructions, and their Minds not yet prepossess'd with other Notions, will receive the deeper and more lasting Impressions from them; and not only for the Informing their Understanding, but Governing their Conversation too, according to that of the Wise Man, *Prov. 22. 6. Train up a Child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.* So that if we have but little success in Reforming the present Age, this will conduce much to the Innocence of the next, and thereby to the Glory of Almighty God, the Prosperity of his Church, and the Eternal Salvation of many Souls. But here we shall need all Assistance from their Parents too, who, by that Interest they have in them, and being so much with them, may do this



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this Good Work, with greater Advantage than our selves, especially if it be seconded by their good Example.

3. To these Means, we must add our daily and fervent Prayers to that God, who searches all Hearts, and can change them as he pleases, who is Light and Truth it self, and can reform all the Errors of Mens Minds; who sees and hates the Ungodly Conversation of some, and the Lukewarmness of others amongst us; who is ready to bless all proper Means, that are Zealously and Prudently used for the Correcting Mens Errors, and Reforming their Hearts and Lives; and with whom the Effectual Fervent Prayer of a Righteous Man availeth much: that he would be pleas'd to direct and assist us in all our Endeavours to these Ends, and Crown them with his Blessing.

2. I am to shew how we are to redeem our Time, or make the best use of it, with respect to the evil of Suffering: And this I shall do in Two Particulars.

1. We must carry our selves prudently towards the Enemies of Religion.

2. We must bear patiently those Sufferings we meet with for the Sake of Christ.

1. We must carry our selves prudently towards the enemies of Religion; that we may not give them any occasion to offer Indignities to us; according to the Rule our Saviour gave his Disciples, Mat. 10. 16. *Behold I send you forth as Sheep in the midst of Wolves: be ye therefore wise as Serpents, and harmless as Doves.* The enmity which many bear to Religion, will make them apt to take up any new Pretences against it; and therefore they will the more curiously observe our Conversation, and be ready to charge us with the least appearance of evil in it.

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How much does it concern us therefore, to take the Apostles Caution in the *Verse* before my *Text*—*Blissed is my man that walketh in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.* Thus we shall make the best use of our time, with respect to them, if we also shew that kindness to them, which was mention'd before.

2. We must bear patiently those Sufferings we meet with for the sake of Christ, in doing our duty. Though I confess that Persecution which comes upon us from the bad Principles and Conversation of Wicked Men, whereby the Honour of God and the Interest of Religion suffer so much in the World, and many Souls are in so great danger of eternal Damnation, will justify our Impatience more then any other. To be quiet and easie in the observation of these things, is the effect, not of a great, but of a senseless Mind; and to be satisfy'd before we have try'd all Means to remedy such evils, would argue a great want of Charity to the Souls of Men. Notwithstanding, even while we have a due Sense of their danger, and are zealously attempting to rescue them out of the Snare of the Devil; yea, if we have try'd all fit Means in vain, or with but little success, we must not be very much discouraged on this account. For though the natural Seed usually springs up quickly, and rewards the Labours of the Husbandman in a few Months, yet the spiritual Seed, the word of God, with which we instruct and warn our People, does often produce its effects many years after. Therefore let us here take the advice which the Wise Man gives with respect to works of Charity, Eccles. 11. 6. *In the Morning sow thy Seed, and in the Evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.* But whatsoever the success of our holy endeavours may be, we our selves shall not lose the reward of them. For if a faithful Minister has cause to complain with the prophet, Isa. 49. 4. *I have labour'd in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain:* he may add with him too, yet



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*surely my Judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.* And *v. 5. Though Israel be not gather'd, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength.* As for other Afflictions which befall us for the same cause, we ought to bear them as persons that have sufficient motives to encourage and comfort us under them all. If Men despise our Profession, we know that God has highly honour'd it. And indeed there is nothing in our holy Office below (the greatest Men, shall I say? or rather) the most glorious Angel to perform. The subject of our Preaching is the Word of God, wherein are all the Treasures of Wisdom and Grace; the end of it is to save Men from Eternal Misery, and bring them to a state of Eternal Happiness. The Sacraments we Administer are pledges of the Love of God in Christ to Penitent Sinners, Engagements upon them to be Faithful to their great Lord, and means to convey those Divine Virtues which will enable them to be so. When we visit the Sick, it is to instruct and Pray for them, that they may be fitted for Glory, if they dye, and to serve and honour God more, if they recover. When we bury the Dead, we do an act of Charity both to them, and to the Living. To us God has given Authority to bless his People in his Name, yea to Remit and Retain Sins. All which things are so far above the contempt of Men, that the holy Angels might envy us in the doing of them, if they were capable of such a Passion. And it is not for any meanness in our Office, but for other reasons, that God has not employ'd those Glorious Creatures in it. The Work does indeed highly deserve them, but we could not bear their Ministrations in it: and God has committed this Treasure to earthen Vessels, to Persons that are mean and frail, and of such narrow capacities as our selves, that the glory of its Success may be wholly his own. *2 Cor. 4. 7.* Therefore if ignorant and senseless Sinners will despise such an Office, it becomes us, with *St. Paul*, to magnify it; and let them consider how much the Eternal God himself is concern'd in this case. For he that despiseth, despiseth not Man but God, *1 Thes. 4. 8.* And our Saviour tells the seventy Disciples, and in them all Ministers of the Gospel, *Luke 10. 16. He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that*

*that despiseth you, despiseth me: and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.* Having therefore such partners in this contempt, it behoves us rather to glory in it, than be discouraged by it. Whatever other Affronts or Injuries a faithful Servant of Christ receives, he may be comforted, not only from the former considerations, but the case of our blessed Lord himself; who came into the World upon the most gracious design that was ever carried on in it; who was perfectly Innocent, and continually went about doing good; and yet endur'd the worst Persecutions of all sorts, from those very Men whose Souls he came to save. Therefore a Patient enduring of Afflictions, will make us in a great measure conformable to the Lord Jesus, and thereby work out for us an exceeding and Eternal weight of Glory. It will also at present secure our own Peace and Tranquillity in despite of any that would disturb it, and so make us better Merchants of the present Season, in Redeeming it from such disturbing thoughts and complaints as those injuries are apt to provoke in us.

Thus have I shew'd, in some part, how we must use our time with respect to the Evil of it; and that there is most need of Redeeming the time, when the days are Evil, to preserve our own Innocency, to reform the Age we live in, to bear our Sufferings patiently, and to promote the Honour of God in the World. To which I might add several other Reasons, as,

1. It is then most Praise-worthy. 2. Then it is especially necessary to prevent the Judgments of God, denounc'd against Sin, particularly that which at last came upon *Ephesus* (as well as the other Churches of *Asia*) for not making a good use of their opportunities and means of Grace; namely, the removal of the Gospel from them, according to our Saviours threatening, *Rev. 2.* *5. Remember from whence thou art fallen, and Repent and do the first Works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy Candlestick out of his place, except thou Repent.* Which Judgment we have also too much reason to fear, and therefore ought to use our best care and diligence to prevent it. 3. The improving such a Season

Season will be more abundantly rewarded, both in this and a future Life.

I might also draw several inferences from what has been spoken, but the time will not give me leave. Therefore I shall only add, that seeing this is a business of the greatest importance, and very difficult too, seeing our time is very short and uncertain, our own abilities insufficient for such a Work, and we live in the midst of many and great Temptations to abate our Zeal and diligence in it; we ought to look the more carefully to our selves, and use the best means to fit us for it. Let us therefore Redeem what precious time we can from all unnecessary avocations, and employ it diligently in Reading, Meditation and Prayer. Let us confer often with one another, for our mutual assistance and encouragement; and let us endeavour always to preserve such a Temper of Mind, free from Worldly Cares and other distracting Passions, as will make us capable of higher improvements by these means, and engaging more entirely in the work of the Lord, for the greater honour of his holy Name, the better success upon the Souls of our People, and a more glorious Reward to our selves, hereafter in the Heavens.

*T H E E N D.*

*E R R A T A.*

**P**age 12. l. 20. r. teaches us. p. 14. l. 23. r. in it. p. 15. l. 50. r. Zeal and Devotion. p. 18. l. 29. r. Magnifying. p. 20. l. 21. r. difference.

**T**He True Interest of a Nation, and the Duty of Magistrates, Ministers and People, in order to the further Settlement and Prosperity of these Kingdoms. A Sermon Preach'd at the Assizes held at Buckingham, July the 5th. 1692. By the same Author. Printed for J. Lawrence, at the Angel in the Poultry. 1693.

